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*I was born a story teller because one was
needed. I am therefore not a disease but a social
necessity.*

—G.B.S.

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Shaw and Rousseau: No Paradox

by Jacques Barzun¹

In an essay written twelve years ago and twice reprinted since, I compared Shaw to Rousseau, having in mind their characters, convictions, and influence. To this comparison, which was fully meant though casually introduced, no one objected until Mr. Archibald Henderson, in reviewing *Shaw: A Critical Survey* (in the May 1954 *Shaw Bulletin*), pounced on the remark as a flagrant howler or paradox marring an otherwise adorable piece. What did I mean by it? Everybody knows that it's the other Frenchman, Voltaire, that Shaw ought to be compared with. Mr. Henderson concluded that I was a careless critic—no critic at all—irritating, anyhow—why didn't I explain myself when I thus flouted a belief universally held?

Not even Mr. Henderson's eminence in the Shavian world and the gratitude we all owe him for his single-minded curiosity and energy would induce me to explain what I consider an obvious point which he has obvious means of verifying. He doubtless remembers the incident of Shaw's review of the Cecil Chesterton-Hilaire Belloc volume on *The Servile State*. Shaw said it was Spencer's thesis about freedom and government all over again. "You can't have read our book!" cried Chesterbelloc. "You are wrong," replied Shaw with the smile of heroic truthfulness, "It's Herbert Spencer I haven't read!" Now I am sure Mr. Henderson has read Shaw and can apply the moral of the anecdote.

But the Editor of the *Shaw Bulletin*, in drawing my attention last summer to Mr. Henderson's strictures, assured me that he and several other readers had been puzzled by my "startling comparison"; and since presumably they are busy people who are not obliged, like a professional critic, to be omnivorous and omniscient, I willingly set down a few of the reasons why Rousseau and Shaw form a parallel.

No one will suppose that such a parallel implies an identity of lives or even the similarity of views found among disciples and descendants. Rousseau will not turn out in my account to have been a prophet of Fabian socialism, any more than in the comparison of Shaw to Voltaire it turns out that Shaw lived as resident philosopher at the court of Kaiser Wilhelm the Second. What an historical comparison affords is a kind of proportion among circumstances necessarily different. In the

¹Jacques Barzun, born and reared in France and now Professor of History at Columbia University, has written numerous volumes of criticism and biography dealing with the 19th century. He has long been interested in Shaw, the present article being provoked by his contribution to Louis Kronenberger's volume, *Shaw: A Critical Survey*. Mr. Barzun's latest book, *God's Country and Mine*, has been described by one critic as "a Shavian view of present-day America."

example under review it will be useful to take the Shaw-Voltaire comparison as standard. It is accepted, indeed canonized by Mr. Henderson's recent thunderbolt against my heresy, and I contend that if this standard parallel is instructive, my heretical one is even more so.

The first and fundamental likeness between Rousseau and Shaw is that both men used their literary talents to set forth complex and positive systems of social reform based on a religious view of life. They wanted society and man made new by a new system embodying a new vision. Neither advocated instant revolution or a bloodbath at any time, but both wanted the present society wholly uprooted in favor of a better one based on the utmost equality practicable. Both men devoted their lives to devising and picturing for their contemporaries the beliefs, manners, and management of public and private life in the society they desired.

If we contrast this with Voltaire's outlook and performance we readily see where the closer kinship lies. Voltaire was a sharp critic of the established order, tireless and courageous in the defense of intellectual and civil rights. But he was on the whole pleased with his age and its tastes. Had the government under which he lived been more business-like, less church-ridden, better able to maintain prosperity, he would have been content to perpetuate all distinctions of class and income for the benefit of the enlightened minority which he deemed alone capable of civilization. The last thing he wanted was a resurgence of faith, however defined. And except for occasional forays into social economics (e.g., *The Man with Forty Shillings*) his writings ridiculed abuses rather than laid down the axioms of radical change.

Like Shaw, on the contrary, Rousseau progressed from a moral suspicion that all was not well with the status quo to a complete undermining of the so-called foundations of society. Shaw tells us that Proudhon's definition, "Property is theft," is the only perfect truism on the subject. But before Proudhon, Rousseau had made the same discovery and written his *Essay on Inequality* around it. Both Shaw and Rousseau see in Equality the only tolerable principle because it puts an end to the conflicts of vanity and greed and permits the development of the individual powers.

In the *Social Contract* (which must be read and not summed up in one sentence misquoted from near the beginning), Rousseau advances part way toward the system which would enshrine equality—part way because the book is uncompleted and must be supplemented with three other works, two of which consist of practical advice to existing governments. What bears on our present purpose is that, like Shaw, Rousseau seeks to combine democratic rule with innate governmental talent (in Rousseau the "lawgiver"; in Shaw the products of anthropometric examination) and to reconcile individual freedom with social control.

At the end of the *Social Contract*, we find that men must be "forced to be free" (Everyman shuns freedom, says Shaw, because it entails responsibility), and they are compelled at least to respect the state religion. For these reasons, again like Shaw, Rousseau has been called a theorist of totalitarianism who did not believe his own earlier praise of freedom. The difficulty cannot be discussed here. What is clear is

that Shaw is no less convinced than Rousseau that government is impossible without a religion to insure unity of action through common beliefs, about morality and the goal of life. This religion is non-theological, or at any rate non-metaphysical. It springs from the religious sentiment which seeks and recognizes the divine wherever it appears in man and nature. Religion is therefore compatible with the march of science, and what it requires in place of ritual is the devotion of self to other than self-centered ends; the practice, that is, of intelligent altruism. The ground of this conduct is the belief that God (in Shaw, the Life Force) pervades our being and cannot work out His purpose except through us. Truth, Goodness, Beauty are our doing—hence our duty. In a very exact sense, Rousseau and Shaw are pragmatists. (Doubters will kindly read William James before raising their voices in protest.)

We are by this time pretty far from Voltaire's bland Deism, verbally and morally conventional:

Logomachos. The trouble one has with these blockheads! Let us go one step at a time. What is God?

Dondinac. My sovereign, my judge, my father.

Logomachos. That isn't what I'm asking you. What is His Nature?

Dondinac. To be powerful and good.

Logomachos. But is He corporeal or spiritual?

Dondinac. How should I know? . . . Will it help me to be a better husband, father, master, citizen?²

No, Voltaire was not looking to the New Man; he had, it is well-known, no special views on education, whereas in the domain of child-rearing Rousseau effected the greatest reform of modern times by substituting the notion of natural development for that of discipline—a discipline designed to enforce adult manners and punish the outcropping of original sin. On this point Shaw is Rousseau's follower, like the rest of the civilized world. His *Sham Education* is a small collection of pieces, but as proof we need hardly more than the maxim: "The vilest abortionist is he who attempts to mould a child's character," together with the repeated remark that the child and the philosopher should not occupy the same room, because children have rights and the philosopher needs quiet.

So much for the common purposes and propositions uniting our two revolutionists on God, man, and society. The likeness thus far would be enough to warrant the "startling comparison" I made in my essay. But I had been struck long before by a more intimate resemblance. What is startling in it for the conventional critic is that Shaw, the ultra modern and outwardly ruthless intellectual, should be linked with Rousseau, whom the critic confidently regards as a sentimental primitivist. Indeed, all that the conventional critic can tell you about Rousseau is "Back to Nature" (a slogan not found in Rousseau's work) and "Noble savage," a phrase out of Dryden, an English poet who died twelve years before Rousseau was born.

The use of Nature as a criterion for judging institutions is of course

²From *The Philosophical Dictionary* (1764) art. God.

no monopoly of Rousseau's. It is a tradition of western thought, and as such it may be said to disclose in its adherents a type of mind, if not a temperament. Shaw and Rousseau are of that type; only, the signs of it in Shaw are by the conventional critic called puritanism. Let us call it in both Shaw and Rousseau: love of simplicity. This love is a passion which explains much of their work, and which turns many minds against them.

For Shaw's advocacy of equal incomes appalls not only those who desire distinctions and luxury and power, but also the more modest who abhor drabness and frugality in daily life: they see themselves having to wear Shaw's Norfolk jacket and woolen stockings. They remember his saying that long after he was well-to-do he could walk down Bond Street without so much as a wish to buy anything. They conjure up the arduous life he led, working for long hours at a pace which—he said it himself—would cause a rebellion among navvies. Shaw's "cultivated" critics would sum up his conception of life by saying: "No joy, no glamour, the gospel of work." This austerity is enough to make them deny him the title of artist; and since he is no Philistine, he must be a Puritan.

Similarly, Rousseau alienated the whole clan of Encyclopedists by selling his fine linen shirts. The act symbolized his refusal to be a parasite, even if this meant living meanly, copying music for hire, and sending his children to the foundling asylum. Thereafter, Rousseau's criticism of manners is a relentless exposure of the aristocratic elegancies that Voltaire so much enjoyed, coupled with a rationale of what became everybody's domestic behavior, the bourgeois simplicity and sanity to which we owe such institutions as living by families without hangers-on, wearing loose clothes and our own hair, taking vacations in the country, and valuing physical sports above gaming, drinking, and philandering.

For further details, see *The New Heloise*. You will find there that Rousseau's recommendations differ from Shaw's vegetarianism, anti-alcoholism, and skepticism about drugs, whether dispensed by doctors or by hostesses. But the impulse and motive are the same. Both Rousseau and Shaw prize self-reliance with some fierceness and want to see it in others as in themselves. Whether this impatience has to do with their both having had ineffectual fathers and a laborious start in life, I leave to others to judge. But clearly it offends their esthetic as well as their moral sense to observe man dependent, a slave to luxury, entertainment, sensuality, or even to so much as the need for afternoon tea.

And yet these two are also great defenders of the passions. Their heroes in history are the men of genius and daring, whose actions they explain as the superior use of reason serving the ends of passionate life. The position is complex and cannot be restated here. Its unfamiliarity even after each of these master expositors has set it forth can be measured by the fact that both have been blamed for dangerous irrationalism (akin to carrying firecrackers carelessly into a drawing room) while they were simultaneously ridiculed for bloodless intellectualism (Shaw) and mindless sentimentality (Rousseau). The muddle here is in the critics' heads.

It is worth noting that in one of his relatively few references to Rousseau, Shaw expresses agreement with him on the character of sexual experience, thereby giving a novel but just interpretation of an important point in the *Confessions*. But there are at least two other large subjects on which our heavenly twins concur. One of these is music, about which Rousseau is almost as amusing and certainly as vigorous and well-informed as Shaw. In this department I again leave the candid explorer to discover how far each writer understood the music drama they both desiderated, the one before the fact, the other after. I shall, however, save the reader the trouble of looking through Voltaire's complete works for any remarks comparable in bulk or depth on the musical art: they are not to be found, and it appears likely that the man who said that the Opera was chiefly sought as a social rendezvous was as near tone deaf as makes no difference.

The other art about which we find Shaw and Rousseau in fundamental agreement is—but I must in charity warn Mr. Henderson that before reading on he should ask B. B. to stimulate the phagocytes—that other art is: the theatre. Accustomed as the conventional critic is to draw inferences without regard to what his author plainly says, he is probably shocked by the reminder that Shaw was no blithe playgoer and lover of footlights. "Why, he wrote forty plays and reviewed a thousand!" Yes, but Shaw was a thinker, not a fan or a subscriber. He regarded the theatre as a dangerous institution and the art of acting as perpetually verging on immorality, blasphemy, and black magic. This, which he was quite logical in believing, he repeatedly wrote. It happens also to be what Rousseau said in his *Lettre a D'Alembert sur les Spectacles*. On this subject, both Shaw and Rousseau follow Plato. The immoral, blasphemous thing about acting consists in giving up one's character and feelings to simulate others that are moreover false; and the dangerous thing about plays is that they are irresistibly attractive and influential. The spectators will also simulate the feelings and actions presented to them, and through their altered conduct life will be marked by the irresponsible poet's touch.

Rousseau and Shaw were accordingly worried about the future of a society in which the stage fables were frivolous or sinister. And Shaw's own work for the stage had to be moral and educational and intellectual to an unheard of degree—sermons, as his opponents said, forgetting that he had said it first.

This use of drama to propagate ideas reminds us of Voltaire, despite his mundane view of the stage and his anger against Rousseau for taking fables so seriously. None the less, as the leading playwright of his age, and an intellectual one at that, Voltaire in this regard displaces Rousseau as Shaw's counterpart in the eighteenth century. That fact and the popularity that both dramatists won by scattering the small change of their wit, and also their pamphleteering, prompt and courageous, in defense of the persecuted, fully justify the standard comparison between Voltaire and Shaw. It stands on its three feet like the tripod of fame itself; yet it should not obscure the broader comparison between Shaw and Rousseau, with which I have not quite done.

For it would be a mistake to stop at the bare writing of intellectual plays without further consideration of Shaw and Rousseau as artists.

Unlike Voltaire, who was a perfecter, they were remolders of their native idiom; and, working from opposite starting points, they produced results occasionally similar. Rousseau renovated French prose by fashioning, in place of Voltaire's sprightly sentences, longer, warmer, more complex and evocative utterances. Rousseau can reason as closely as Voltaire, but he can also make us see. The set pieces of rhetoric here and there in his works are not his characteristic tone and should not deceive us, any more than Voltaire's reputation as a wit should make us think that Rousseau had none. He has on the contrary an excellent vein of satire and another of humor, sometimes hidden under irony but more often simply comic—as in his description of the Paris Opera (1760),³ which for pace and exaggeration one might think taken from *Music in London*.

Having brought my tandem pair, after much serious doctrine, to consort with the comic spirit, I may be allowed to clinch their resemblance by showing them in a final, rather comic pose familiar to them both: I mean as faddists. The word and the fact, I hasten to say, do not establish our superiority; it merely adds a feature to theirs. Their vision, their courage, their thoroughness made them adopt or promote anti-conventional ways which, for all they knew, belonged with the rest to the new social order. Rousseau's new musical notation was as hopeful as Shaw's reformed alphabet. But when thinking of the comedy of fads, we may prefer to call up before the mind's eye the double image of Shaw walking down the Strand in a silvery woolen garment made by Dr. Jaeger and of Rousseau in his "Armenian" dress and hat, chosen for the same sensible reason—warmth and free motion outside the conventional bands and ties and buckles worn in Voltaire's day or ours.

I have done with the "startling comparison." But a postscriptal thought occurs to me, which I note down in self-defense: let no one infer that because I have made much of Rousseau and set limits to Voltaire's claims in *this special connection*, I am therefore Voltaire's depreciator. I am much too interested in variety, past and present, to depreciate anything so good as Voltaire. Ultimate preferences need not always be thrust on one's readers, and when not stated are seldom safely inferred from comments or comparisons having a critical or defining purpose. Taking these expressed judgments for what they are is in fact part of the same common sense as discarding the conventional notions which make the truth appear startling.

³Translated in my *Pleasures of Music* (New York, 1951), pp. 201-3.

On the 'Unpleasantness' of "Pygmalion"

by Norbert F. O'Donnell¹

Recent studies of Shaw have almost unanimously treated *Pygmalion* as an entirely Pleasant Play, seeing its whole meaning in what they seem to regard as the unique personal transformation of Eliza Doolittle. William Irvine, in his *Universe of G.B.S.*, merely states what threatens to become a majority verdict: "'Pygmalion' is shameless art for art's sake, a fairy tale told with relentless logic and realism" (New York, 1949, p. 289). In this interpretation, Eliza Doolittle's development from guttersnipe to "duchess" to human being has no social significance, and the appearances of Alfred Doolittle are amusing interludes, imparting no more than a flavor of social criticism to the play. Shaw's sequel, written in protest against the sentimentalization of his final scenes by actors and audiences, may even be dismissed, as it has been by one critic, as "something less than serious," a Shavian smoke screen concealing an old-fashioned story which logically should end in love between Eliza and Higgins. (Milton Crane, "Pygmalion," *PMLA*, LXVI, 882-3.)

Now the Cinderella-like transformation of Eliza Doolittle does, of course, provide the chief dramatic impact of *Pygmalion*; but it is by no means a transformation empty of social significance. Nor is the characterization of Alfred Doolittle merely a cleverly-contrived exorcism on the play. In fact, Alfred's comic denunciation of "middle-class morality" as a morality rooted in intimidation is the key not only to our understanding of his own plight but also to our full understanding of Eliza's. Transformed in manners and accent, Eliza, like her father after he becomes rich, is intimidated by life. Thanks to her intimidation, she develops a thoroughly middle-class view of love and marriage—precisely the view which Shaw had once approvingly seen attacked in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. It is only when she is able to throw off both her fears and the suburban love-morality which they inspire that Eliza becomes fully human. It is most logical to conclude that after this final transformation, as Shaw suggests in his sequel, she loves Higgins no more than Ibsen's Nora in the end loves her Torvald.

Alfred Doolittle explicitly denounces the conventional morality as a morality of intimidation only after the Wannafeller will has condemned him to hideous respectability, but clearly the idea is not a new one to him. His outcry that he is intimidated is, of course, produced by his finding himself committed by his new position to a series of social bargains which, thanks to his fear of the poorhouse, he does

¹Dr. O'Donnell is an Assistant Professor of English at Bowling Green State University (Ohio), where he teaches courses in the drama, including this year a graduate seminar on Shaw. His articles on Renaissance drama have appeared in various learned journals.

not dare reject—bargains with tradesmen, with doctors, with relatives, and with the woman who is now to be his wife. However, on his first appearance in the play, his comic critique of bourgeois ways has the same theme. Middle-class charity, he feels, is a device for instilling in the “undeserving poor” the fear of the godly; middle-class marriage is a bargain which enables husbands and wives to exact reluctant favors from one another. On his first appearance in the play, he is certain that he would get the best of the bargain of marriage, if his woman could be persuaded to marry him; on his last appearance, “bought up” as he is, he fears that he will get the worst of it.

The essence of Eliza’s problem is that she too is intimidated and that she too, before her final transformation, becomes a prisoner of middle-class morality. From her first appearance until her final scenes, she is in the grip of fear. Her famous cockney outcry, a wail of mingled fear and defiance, expresses the unsophisticated intimidation of the guttersnipe by the powerful and rich; her attempt to win the love of Pygmalion-Higgins is the evidence of her fear of the role of the woman who has genteel manners without the money to maintain herself in a genteel setting—an emotion which Shaw, as a onetime member of the “downstart” class, understood very well. Because she is intimidated, Eliza attempts to make a “bargain in affection” with Higgins precisely paralleling the social bargains in which her declassed father finds himself involved; in return for many small services to Higgins, she expects to exact affection and security. Higgins is wrong about many things, but surely he pronounces Shaw’s judgment on her attempt:

I dont and wont trade in affection. You call me a brute because you couldn't buy a claim on me by fetching my slippers and finding my spectacles. You were a fool: I think a woman fetching a man's slippers is a disgusting sight: did I ever fetch your slippers? I think a good deal more of you for throwing them in my face. No use slaving for me and then saying you want to be cared for: who cares for a slave? . . . if you dare to set up your little dog's tricks of fetching and carrying slippers against my creation of a Duchess Eliza, I'll slam the door in your silly face.

One recalls that Ibsen’s Nora also has her repertory of “tricks”—dancing, dressing up, making Torvald comfortable—which she consciously uses in striking her marriage bargain with her husband. It is only when she comes to loath this commercial transaction as a form of slavery that she is able to visualize what Ibsen calls the “true marriage.” Shaw is less explicit than Ibsen. He is writing a largely Pleasant Play for performance by a popular actress. But his story of the metamorphoses of Eliza cannot be fully understood unless one realizes that her final escape is from a “doll’s house” which she herself attempts to build. One cannot help wishing that Shaw were alive to write comedy of those schools for wives in which giant corporations now train the intimidated wives of promising executives to perform the “little dog’s tricks” which will presumably keep their husbands continuously productive.

This interpretation of *Pygmalion* as a thoroughly unified critique of middle-class morality is supported by well-known Shavian attitudes. As Shaw has said, his primary interest as a writer of comedies is in

"the struggle between human vitality and the artificial system of morality" (Archibald Henderson, *Bernard Shaw, Playboy and Prophet*, New York, 1932, p. 189). The artificial system of middle-class morality is artificial because, as in *Pygmalion*, it enforces in all the relations of social life a network of "bargains" born of intimidation by the insecurities of life in modern business society. In the end this structure of individual bargains supports the power of such men as Undershaft, the Mephistophelian capitalist of *Major Barbara*. Undershaft is realistically aware that he holds his power only because his men, although freed from fear of poverty, remain divided into all of the small groups of "bargainers" conventionally present in the world outside his "model" community. These representative workers intimidate one another. Such is the power in the world of the Shavian drama of the artificial system portrayed in *Pygmalion*.

Shaw's ultimate optimism is, of course, reflected in the transformation of Eliza at the end of the play. Vitality triumphs over system. It triumphs because Eliza is sufficiently angered by the arrogance of Higgins to shake off the fears which make her less than human. Anger gives her purpose, and, as so often in Shaw, courage is a function of strong purpose. Those who would make *Pygmalion* more Pleasant than it is have tended to blur this point by quoting approvingly one of Eliza's speeches to Colonel Pickering:

You see, really and truly, apart from the things anyone can pick up (the dressing and the proper way of speaking, and so on), the difference between a lady and a flower girl is not how she behaves, but how she's treated. I shall always be a flower girl to Professor Higgins, because he always treats me as a flower girl, and always will; but I know I can be a lady to you, because you always treat me as a lady, and always will.

Arthur Nethercot, in his recent *Men and Supermen: the Shavian Portrait Gallery*, not only approves of Eliza's sentiments but also suggests that they indicate that perhaps Pickering is, after all, the Pygmalion of the title, the real source of Eliza's transformation (Cambridge, Mass., 1954, pp. 215-16).

But surely from a Shavian point of view what Eliza says is middle-class blasphemy. Differences in speech and manners aside, the difference between a flower girl and a lady is an inner one. All of the Colonel Pickeringings in her world cannot make a true lady of Mrs. Eynsford Hill because inwardly she is intimidated. Nor does Colonel Pickering's mannerly behavior make a lady of Eliza. It is true that he is one of those whom Shaw has praised as "natural republicans and communists whose good manners are the same for all classes" (*Everybody's Political What's What?*, New York, 1944, p. 58). However, he understands Eliza's ultimate problem even less than Higgins does, and he has nothing to do with leading her to throw off the fear which stifles her. No, Higgins is the Pygmalion of the title, and the title is a characteristically Shavian anti-romantic irony.

The tendency to sentimentalize *Pygmalion* has, of course, always been most apparent in the treatment of its ending by actors, now elaborately rationalized by at least one critic. Is there anything to be said for the devices by which actors manage to end performances of

the play with the suggestion of love and marriage between Eliza and Higgins? Well, it is conceivable that an Eliza freed of the intimidation which leads her to attempt her "bargain in affection" with Higgins might truly love him, and Higgins might find the new Eliza more like his mother than any young woman he has known. (Perhaps it was this line of reasoning which led Shaw to approve the ending of Gabriel Pascal's film version of the play.) However, the lines of that final duel of wits between Eliza and Higgins, flashing with wit and hostility, give the actors almost no means of preparing an audience for this conclusion. The dominant emotion of this final scene is clearly the inevitable antagonism between creator and created being which Shaw stresses in his sequel. Galatea is ashamed of the middle-class attitudes she has displayed; Pygmalion is irritatingly arrogant in his triumphant moment of creation. All of the Unpleasant implications of the play which have been examined here are very close to the surface. One wishes for directors, actors, and critics with the courage to make them clear.



A Continuing Check-List of Shaviana

I. Works by Shaw

G.B.S. ON DEMOCRACY, in the *New Republic*, Fortieth Anniversary issue (November 22, 1954). Reprinted from the issue of April 14, 1937.

SHAW ON CENSORSHIP. An Extract from the Minutes of Evidence before the Joint Select Committee of the House of Lords and the House of Commons on the Stage Plays (Censorship), 1909. Shavian Tract No. 3 (February, 1955), published by the Shaw Society (London).

II. Shaviana - Books

Bentley, Eric: *THE DRAMATIC EVENT: AN AMERICAN CHRONICLE*. New York, Horizon Press, 1954. Contains a review (Chapter 9, "What is Acting?") of the 1952 New York production of *The Millionairess*.

Mander, R., and J. Mitchenson (compilers): *THEATRICAL COMPANION TO SHAW*. New York, Pitman, 1955. To be reviewed in our September issue.

Martz, Louis L.: "The Saint as Tragic Hero: Saint Joan and Murder in the Cathedral," in *TRAGIC THEMES IN WESTERN LITERATURE*, ed. Cleanth Brooks. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1955.

O'Casey, Sean: *SUNSET AND EVENING STAR*. New York, Macmillan, 1954. Contains a chapter, "Shaw's Corner."

Rubinstein, H. F.: *BERNARD SHAW IN HEAVEN*. London, Heinemann, 1954. A one-act play, with a preface by St. John Ervine.

III. Shaviana - Periodicals

Erikson, Erik H.: "Identity and Totality: Psychoanalytic Observations on the Problems of Youth," *Human Development Bulletin*, Fifth Annual Symposium, 1954 (U. of Chicago Committee on Human Development). Contains a psychoanalytic examination of a childhood, based apparently on Shaw's preface to *Immaturity*.

Henderson, Archibald: "Bernard Shaw's Novels: And Why They Failed," *Dalhousie Review*, Winter, 1954-5. Reprinted in this issue of the *Shaw Bulletin*.

West, E. J.: "Saint Joan: A Modern Classic Reconsidered," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, October, 1954.

Shaw's Novels: And Why They Failed

by Archibald Henderson¹

Thoughtful readers of Shaw, especially readers of his novels, invariably wonder why he began his literary life as a novelist. A retrospective glance, covering the first twenty-seven years of his life, should afford a satisfactory answer to this query. Shaw once told me that he must have been born with a knowledge of the alphabet, because he never remembered learning it. The first recorded act of his life was involuntarily standing on his head. Fortunately for Shaw, and for the world, this became a fixed habit, as has been recorded in one of Max Beerbohm's delightful cartoons. Like myself, for some of my ancestors came directly from Dublin to North Carolina, Shaw was brought up on the Bible, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *The Swiss Family Robinson* (which he and his sisters detested), *Robinson Crusoe*, the novels of Sir Walter Scott, and the rollicking adventure stories of Charles Lever (which were responsible in part for his anti-romanticism). Later on, he read Byron diligently, swallowed Shakespeare (with illustrations) in gobbets, and devoured all of Shelley, whom he pedestaled and enshrined as his literary deity.

Dickens he began to read at a very early age, and continued to read him with undiminished delight to the end of his life. Throughout his career he continued to pay unbounded tribute to Dickens, in both his critical and creative writings, unequivocally pronouncing him to be "by far the greatest man since Shakespeare that England has ever produced" in the art of fictive writing. At the height of his career he described Dickens as "one of the greatest writers that ever lived," and threw critical distinctions in the discard with the blanket endorsement of all of his books as "magnificent." And yet Shaw never lost the power of discrimination between the artist and the person, between Dickens' genius as a novelist and his character as a man. Shaw once remarked to me that, as a lad, he had seen Dickens, presumably on one of his lecturing or barnstorming tours; but acknowledged that he was unfavorably impressed by his flashy dress, loud voice, and over-effusive manner. Writing of sex and sex-control, Shaw once deplored the domestic problems raised by incontinence, which he claimed would be solved under Socialism. "Charles Dickens' marriage was wrecked after twenty years by the state to which his wife had been reduced by chronic pregnancy resulting in an enormous family which, if it should have been produced at all, should have been spaced out by decent intervals for recuperation."

¹Dr. Henderson, president of the Shaw Society of America and official biographer of Shaw, is now completing his centenary biography, *Bernard Shaw: Man of the Century*. The present article appeared in the *Dalhousie Review* (Winter 1954-5), and is here reprinted with Dr. Henderson's kind permission.

II

One day, while at work in an estate agency in Dublin, Shaw was startled by the remark of another apprentice that every young man thinks he is going to be a great man. This observation, Shaw once confessed to me, made him suddenly aware that this was his own precise intention. Although naturally "teachable," he had found his teachers, in all the schools he had attended, wholly unsympathetic, and in consequence he habitually neglected his studies. But, as it happened, he was an insatiable student of literature, and superbly self-educated in the best models for creative writing. This was long before the days of Dr. Douglas Hyde and the Gaelic League, W. B. Yeats, Lady Gregory, the Abbey Theatre, and the Irish Literary Movement. Although Shaw as a lad and young man was fascinated with drama, opera and pantomime, he never so much as dreamed of writing plays. "I had to go to London," he wrote in some autobiographic confessions at the age of sixty-five, ". . . the literary centre for the English language, and for such artistic culture as the realm of the English language (in which I proposed to be king) could afford."

So in March, 1876, at the age of nineteen, Shaw rendered himself permanently expatriate, joining his mother and sisters in London. Despite his reiterated assertions that, like Hamlet, he was lacking in ambition and rose to the top merely by the "sheer force of gravitation" (surely "levitation" would be more accurately descriptive!), the plain truth of the matter is that, at this early period, he was obsessed by two burning ambitions: to write successful novels and to become a master of the English language. In one of the earliest published interviews with Shaw, he is quoted to the following effect: "My destiny was to educate London, but I had neither studied my pupil nor related my ideas properly to the common stock of human knowledge." Jocular and bumptious as is this oracular utterance, it is extraordinarily close to the mark, as we shall soon see. Shaw wanted to write fiction, believed he could write fiction, and proceeded to write fiction to teach himself to write fiction. His own rephrasing of Menander's famous lines is singularly pertinent here:

For know, rash youth, that in this starcrossed world
Fate drives us all to find our chiefest good
In what we can, and not in what we would.

III

During the five-year period, 1879-1883, with an energy, pertinacity and stoicism which deserved a better fate, the passionately ambitious young recluse wrote five novels, on an average of one a year, which encountered virtually unfailing refusal at the hands of British publishers. The first, *Immaturity*, a long autobiographical novel which he wrote in five months to reveal to the world how immature he was, succeeded in its purpose—not reaching publication until it appeared in Shaw's *Collected Works* half a century after it was written. The four remaining novels, in order of composition, *The Irrational Knot*, *Love Among the Artists*, *Cashel Byron's Profession*, and *An Unsocial Socialist*, were submitted to upwards of sixty British publishers—all virtually to no avail. Several ran serially in Socialist magazines, and one or two actually appeared between covers in queer, misshapen, strictly limited (necessarily) editions, with sometimes garbled title pages.

Singularly enough, one escaped across the Atlantic and appeared—of all places!—in “Harper’s Handy Series” and in “George Munro’s Seaside Library,” famous for the light, superficial romances of writers of the type of “The Duchess,” Mrs. Alexander, and Miss M. E. Braddon. Memory lingers fondly on the “hammock literature” which included *The Duchess*, *Doris* and *Lady Audley’s Secret*. But how could *Cashel Byron’s Profession* have got into that galley?

Over a period of nine years, 1876-1885 inclusive, the man who later won a great fortune and achieved global renown, earned by his novels and periodical writings an average of one cent a day! Only Shaw’s confidence in his own powers and his conviction that he belonged in the company of the immortals, enabled him to rise above one of the most devastating failures in the history of literature.

No serious or detailed attempt has been made by anyone to explain the universal rejection of Shaw’s novels by all the reputable British publishers. Some of Shaw’s own letters and the texts of readers’ reports on the novels, which have been made available within recent years, shortly before and since his death, throw a revealing light on the subject. The letters to publishers show that Shaw was modest, sensitive, and shy—strange as it may seem!—and employed no high-pressure methods of salesmanship, so familiar to the reading public of today. He asked no one to recommend his manuscripts, sent no advance blurbs, and in fact had no literary friends of either influence or affluence to go to bat for him. Below is the text of the first letter known to me accompanying the manuscript of one of his novels: a letter concerning *Immaturity* to Messrs. W. Blackwood & Sons, London, from 13 Victoria Grove, September 22, 1880:

Gentlemen

On the 24th of last March, I submitted to you, by your permission, an MS novel entitled “Immaturity.” If you have had leisure to examine it, I should feel obliged by your communicating the result.

Pardon me for thus anticipating your convenience, and believe me

faithfully yours

G. B. Shaw

It is to be noted that, in advance of submitting the manuscript, he had written to the publisher prior to March 24, 1880, requesting permission to submit the manuscript. Not unnaturally, the ambitious young candidate for literary honors chafed under the publisher’s neglect. Often months elapsed before he received any intimation from the publisher that the precious manuscript had even been received.

Another brief letter of similar type, having several points of interest, is addressed to Messrs. Smith, Elder & Company, July 14, 1881:

Gentlemen

Will you oblige me by reading a MS novel of mine, for which I am desirous to find a publisher? It is of the usual length, and deals with modern society.

After the 1st prox. my address will be 37 Fitzroy Street W.

I am, Gentlemen,

Your obedient servant

G. B. Shaw

This manuscript may have been that of either *Immaturity* or *Love Among the Artists*, probably the former as dealing with “modern society” rather than with art or music. The date of removal of the Shaw

family is given as approximately August 1, 1881, although one "authority" has given it as January, 1881. One shudders over "what might have been" had either Blackwood or Smith Elder & Company accepted a Shaw manuscript. We might have had a second-rate Thackeray or Trollope, instead of a first-rate Dickens, Voltaire and Moliere, rolled into one. The escape was indeed a narrow one. For Blackwood did accept *Immaturity*, but on further consideration reneged—without either protest or expressed regret from the stoical young Celt.

Primarily from readers' reports are we enabled to discover some of the real reasons why Shaw's novels failed. Rejection is a flinty fact, without need of explanation; but at least it indicates disapproval of some sort. George Meredith, for example, then a reader for Chapman and Hall, gave a laconic but uninformative report on *Immaturity*: the single word "No." The most sympathetic of the publishers was Macmillan; and the report of this anonymous reader on *Immaturity* contains expressions of moderate approval of a manuscript which he found to be undoubtedly clever, but dry, unattractive, devoid of emotion, and far too long. The reader further reports:

I have given more than usual attention to this M.S., for it has a certain quality about it—not exactly of an attractive kind, but still not common. It is the work of a humourist, and a realist, crossed, however, by veins of merely literary discussion. There is a piquant oddity about the situations now and then: and the characters are certainly not drawn after the conventional patterns.

The critical conscience of the reader, however, compelled a second reading of the manuscript. The conclusion was adverse: "On reflecting over the MS. of Mr. Shaw, I am very very doubtful of the expediency of publication." The word "expediency" raises a multitude of unanswerable queries.

A year later, Macmillan's anonymous reader was even more adverse, this time toward *The Irrational Knot*, which he unequivocally damns:

... A novel of the most disagreeable kind. It is clearly the work of a man with certain originality and courage of mind . . . But the thought of the book is all wrong; the whole idea of it is odd, perverse and crude. It is the work of a man writing about life, when he knows nothing of it.

Shaw had not much better luck with *Cashel Byron's Profession*, with its Horatio Alger hero and wealthy, aristocratic heroine. Macmillan's reader found it "by no means without flavour or originality . . . but too whimsical for anything . . . I should like to see the writer at work on a happier theme. He has some promise of writing in him if he did not disgust us by his subject." And this concerning a story which convulsed Robert Louis Stevenson with merriment, delighted William E. Henley, made William Morris chuckle, and even pleased the ever-hard-to-please William Archer! We should not forget, however, that when Mrs. Stevenson read *Cashel Byron's* fervent utterance, "I hate my mother," she was so outdone that she slammed the book shut and flung it away to the far corner of the room.

After appearing serially in the Socialist magazine *To-Day* the pages of *Cashel Byron's Profession* were stereotyped and a thousand copies struck off. Later on, another, a shilling edition was brought out. By 1890 it was reported a failure, having sold only 1500 copies, whereas

Shaw expected 10,000 to be quickly gobbled up. There is a sort of grim irony in the circumstance that Bentley, the publisher, who had first refused the manuscript, was eager to bring it out after it was praised by Stevenson and Henley, and was "furious," to use Shaw's adjective, on learning that Shaw had already given it to another publisher. Gene Tunney, famous pugilist, called it a "silly story" and expressed the opinion that the character of Cashel Byron was "badly drawn." Shaw once said to me that he considered admiration of this novel the "mark of a fool."

The climax in this comedy of errors came when the manuscript of *An Unsocial Socialist* reached Macmillan and was entrusted to the tender mercies of John Morley, the future cabinet minister and biographer of Gladstone. It fell to his lot to answer the burning literary question of the day, so aggressively posed by Shaw: Was the time ripe for a staid, conservative British publisher to bring out a novel with a Socialist program of Marxian manufacture and a hero who was a literary prefigurement of Lenin? Morley described the manuscript as a "dish which I fancy only the few would relish," and surmised that the general public "would not know whether the writer was serious, or was laughing at them." Nor did he believe that the "Ruskinian doctrine" of the book would prove very attractive to a large public. However, of the writer's ability he is in no doubt: "The author knows how to write, he is pointed, rapid, forcible, sometimes witty, often powerful, and occasionally eloquent . . . If he is young, he is a man to keep one's eye upon."

The first of Shaw's novels to find a commercial publisher was *An Unsocial Socialist*, which was begun July 9 and completed November 1, 1883. This novel, written in less than four months, was a truncated affair, being merely the first two chapters of a huge projected work describing the imminent Socialist revolution and downfall of capitalist civilization. The remainder of the narrative, although never told as a novel, may be found, it goes without saying, scattered piecemeal throughout Shaw's subsequent works, both plays and treatises. True to the Shavian trait of putting the cart before the horse, the last-written of his novels was published first, serially in *To-Day*. After various rejections by standard publishers, the manuscript, originally entitled *The Heartless Man*, was accepted by the publishing firm of Swan Sonnenschein, Lowrey and Company. Although there were two editions, namely three printings of the "Scarletinas" and two of the "Maroons" (so-called from the colors of the bindings), the sales were minute; and the price quickly fell from six to two shillings per copy, one lot going for less than a shilling per copy. Shaw solemnly announced to all his friends that his royalties had increased one hundred and seventy per cent in two years. This proud boast was only Shaw's little joke—for his royalties in 1889 were two shillings tenpence and for 1891 seven shillings tenpence, an actual increase of about 170 per cent.

IV

Bernard Shaw's novels, despite an occasional minor *succes d'estime* in Socialist and radical circles, failed; and from the financial standpoint, failed ignominiously. And yet they were by no means complete artistic failures. Half a century ago the late James Huneker declared that, judging by the "supreme pages of his tales," Shaw could rank higher

as a novelist than as a dramatist. Christopher Morley regarded Shaw the dramatist as a "great novelist gone wrong." An anonymous critic in the *New Statesman* in 1930 ventured the opinion that "Shaw might, had he chosen, have taken that place in the English novel which has been unfilled since the death of Thackeray." On the basis of some of Shaw's recently released confessions and the opening of his personal files since his death, it is possible to venture a tentative answer to the provocative query: Why did Shaw's novels fail?

Early in my acquaintance with him, he explained to me that he had arrived in England at an exceptionally unfortunate moment, historically: when he was not yet twenty years old, and just six years after the introduction in England of compulsory education. The newly literate reading public, crude and undeveloped in literary taste, wanted only novels like the penny dreadfuls ("penny plain, tuppence colored") of the third quarter of the nineteenth century: sentimental thrillers dealing with beautiful, dumb heroines and brave, dashing heroes not infrequently criminal in character. The vast army of semi-literate new readers wanted scenes of burning love and daring adventure by writers of fiction eager to tell lucrative lies for their diversion. The callow young Irishman, despite Stevenson's classic success with *Treasure Island*, even though lacking the dim blonde, would not, and indeed could not, qualify for this role. He wrote deliberately for possible readers endowed with speculative intellects "restlessly cerebrate," who earnestly craved exhibitions of character and suggestions of social problems.

In response to a request from Mr. Daniel Macmillan to be allowed to publish his early letters to the firm, he replied with a frank statement of some of the reasons for his failure as a novelist. (Charles Morgan, *The House of Macmillan, 1843-1943*, for this and other quotations concerning Macmillan.)

I began, not very wisely, by calling on all the publishers in person to see what they were like, and they did not like me . . . I was young (23), raw, Irish from Dublin, and Bohemian without being in the least convivial or self-indulgent, deeply diffident inside and consequently brazen outside, and . . . utterly devoid of reverence. . . . Altogether a discordant personality in the eyes of the elderly great publishers of those days, a now extinct species.

In 1946, when Shaw presented the manuscripts of four of his novels to the Royal Library of Dublin, he gave a brief but illuminating statement in his own handwriting, which offers another explanation of the treatment which his novels received at the hands of the British publishers and British public:

"AN UNSOCIAL SOCIALIST"

The title of this novel finished me with the publishers. One of them refused even to read it. I had read the first volume of Karl Marx's *Capital*, and made my hero a Marxian Socialist. This was beyond endurance. A clerk for a hero (my first) was not a recommendation; but at least he accepted the world as it was and wore a white linen collar in its social eddies. I was perhaps to be encouraged. But my second, a working electrical engineer crashing through the castes and mastering them: that was distasteful and incorrect. I was going wrong. Then a British Bee-

thoven, careless of his clothes, ungovernable, incomprehensible, poor, living in mean lodgings at an unfashionable address: this was absurd. The next, a prizefighter, wooing and marrying a priggishly refined lady of property, was a bit of romance without a child dying in it but with a fight or two.

But a Socialist! A Red, an enemy of civilization, a universal thief, atheist, adulterer, anarchist, and apostle of Satan he disbelieved in! ! And presented as a rich young gentleman, eccentric but not socially unpresentable! ! ! Too bad.

And all the time I did not know that I was being ostracized on social and political grounds instead of, as I thought, declined on my literary merits, which, as is now clear, were never in question.

V

Shaw was intimately acquainted with the novels of Dickens and Trollope (although the latter was ludicrously misunderstood by Dublin readers), had read Scott for romance, thereby "getting over" romance for good; and appreciated Thackeray's satiric studies of the English governing classes, although reacting violently from his slavery to sentimental ideals. But as to any first-hand knowledge of Horseback Hall—the astoundingly uncultured fox-hunting, country-house, English aristocratic set—Shaw was a rank Outsider. He regarded the British as barbarians appallingly deficient in literary and musical culture and in esthetic sensibility. Of himself at this time, on the contrary, he wrote in 1921:

The moment music, painting, literature, or science came into question, the positions were reversed: it was I who was the Insider. I had the intellectual habit; and my natural combination of critical faculty with literary resource needed only a clear comprehension of life in the light of an intelligent theory: in short, a religion, to set it in triumphant operation.

But this, alas! at the time was precisely what the immature Shaw—rationalist and atheist of a sophomoric type—did not have. And this basic desideratum Shaw was a quarter of a century in acquiring.

The style of the young novelist, jejune and stilted, was a model of literary propriety, with meticulously executed sentences and paragraphs of pedantic precision. "I resolved," Shaw confesses, "that I would write nothing that should not be intelligible to a foreigner with a dictionary . . . and I therefore avoided idiom." This was the literary fashion of the day. The persons of quality in fiction spoke with a decorous stylishness which made them appear unnatural; and only the persons of more humble station spoke idiomatically. This Young Self bore little or no resemblance to the Later Self, who in the plays displayed a marvellously pliant, expressive, idiomatic style. Indeed, one of Shaw's greatest triumphs was the demonstration, in play-writing, that idiom is perhaps the most vitally effective form of language. In 1905 Shaw, profoundly influenced as a Socialist by economic questions, remarked:

If . . . I failed [as a novelist] to create a convincingly verisimilar atmosphere of aristocracy, it was not because I had any illusions or ignorances as to the common humanity of the peerage, and not because I gave literary style to its conversation, but because, as I had no money, I had to blind myself to its enormous importance, with the result that I missed the point of view, and with it the whole moral basis, of the class which rightly values money, and plenty of it, as the first condition of a bearable life.

In Shaw's opinion the failure of his novels was due "not to any lack of literary competence on my part, but to the antagonism raised by my hostility to respectable Victorian thought and society." This is the subjective plea of the Socialist and moralist, not the objective judgment of the literary critic. The novels are strangely unreal, largely because the characters are two-dimensional and the plots are episodic. Shaw's 3-D characters first appear in his plays, beginning with *Candida*; and he created a type of disquisitory and discursive play to which episodic treatment was natural. Shaw was predestined to practice the art of fiction, but, for him, the novel was the wrong medium. In 1888, Swan Sonnenschein, who published *An Unsocial Socialist*, wrote to Shaw: "I still think it is as clever a novel as we have brought out," suggesting that Shaw "go in for plays (which are even more suited to you, in my opinion)" than novels. Shaw himself arrived at the same conclusion, writing on January 28, 1890: "My next effort in fiction, if ever I have time to make one, will be a play." Of the novels, he once said to me: "They are very green things, very carefully written." To Mr. Daniel Macmillan he wrote what he calls the "soul truth":

I really hated those five novels, having drudged through them like any other industrious apprentice because there was nothing else I would or could do. That in spite of their disagreeableness they somehow induced readers rash enough to begin them to go on to the end and resent that experience seems to me now a proof that I was a born master of the pen. But the novel was not my proper medium. I wrote novels because everybody else did so then.



Shavian Publications in Stock

The following publications (some in very limited quantity) are available to members of the Shaw Society of America. Please make payment by check or money order payable to **The Shaw Bulletin**, or by coin.

SHAW ON CENSORSHIP. Shavian Tract No. 3 (See check-list of Shaviana for additional details). 50c

DRAMA MAGAZINE. Spring 1951, Shaw Memorial number, containing articles by Gilbert Murray, Clifford Bax, C. B. Purdom, Barry Jackson, etc. \$1.00

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW AND THE JEWS by J. Hodess. A mimeograph reprint (14 pages) of an article in the December 1950 **Zion Magazine**, Jerusalem. 20c

THE SHAVIAN. Bulletin of the Shaw Society (London). Nos. 2, 3, 4. Each 50c

SHAW'S LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT. Appletree Press, 1954. \$1.00

THE SHAW BULLETIN. Nos. 2, 3, 5, 6, 7. Each \$1.00

The Quintessence of Winstenism

by Eric J. Batson¹

A reading of Stephen Winsten's *Shaw's Corner* (London: Hutchinson, 1952; New York: Roy Publishers, 1954) calls to mind my own two meetings with Bernard Shaw. The first was during the bomb-scarred, war-weary, but climatically glorious summer of 1944, when he himself stopped me, a youthful stranger, courteously to pass the time of day in the woods near Ayot (where I occasionally sought sanctuary on summer afternoons from Hitler's hideous weapons then falling on London). The second occasion was in 1947, when I was introduced to him as the (then) London Secretary of the Shaw Society (he immediately wanted to know if there was a Foreign Secretary!). Our author was in his famous "sun-hut," touching up a scene of his latest play, and with typical Shavian consideration for youth endured an interruption that might have proved just as disastrous as the historic Person from Porlock's was to Coleridge—and that even Mr. Shaw might not have taken so kindly from someone nearer his own age! He was as ostensibly as ever in the grip of the Life Force, and in the short space of ten minutes or so touched upon Public Libraries in the London Borough of Saint Pancras, where both he and I had worked, the Coal Trade (in which, like Mrs. George's husband in *Getting Married*, I was then engaged), Technicians, Oscar Wilde, and diverse other topics. His dismissal of me was firm but cordial, and before leaving the house I was able to take note in the study and adjoining rooms of the painting by Augustus John, the bust by Rodin, a large collection of hats (of all shapes and sizes) and walking-sticks, and a not very pretty china statuette of William Shakespeare. Outside it was a day of radiant sunshine. Inside prevailed an atmosphere of peaceful serenity—irradiation one part sunshine and nine parts Shaw.

It is with the period just before and after this second meeting that Mr. Winsten's book is concerned, the author having been Shaw's close neighbor during his last years and the husband of the sculptress of the very ugly Saint Joan statue in Shaw's garden. We are, so far, indebted to Mr. Winsten for his editing of *The Quintessence of GBS* and of *GBS 90* and for his biography of one of Shaw's greatest friends, Henry Salt (*Salt and His Circle*, 1951). Whether we are indebted to him for his writings on Shaw, first in *Days with Bernard Shaw* and now with *Shaw's Corner*, has been questioned, one critic exclaiming: "If all that Mr. Winsten records is accurate, the publication of this book is not the act of a friend; if it is not accurate, its publication is equally unjustified . . . I for one find it hard to believe that Shaw was so pathetically dependent on the Winsten family in his last years." To

¹Mr. Batson, a frequent contributor to the *Shaw Bulletin*, is general secretary of the Shaw Society (London) and long-time editor of its publication, *The Shavian*.

which another critic has replied: "Old age can be ugly and the final period of a long-living great man must usually be distressing to his followers . . . Deprived of the loving companionship of kith and kin, [Shaw] came to depend on the most intelligent of his neighbors, and posterity will be grateful to Mr. Winsten for preserving an intimate record of their association."

One does not expect, of course, to get from Winsten the youthful or even vigorous middle-aged Cyrano-like Shaw of the Chestertonian portrait. It is a fact, however, that one does not quite expect the shock of finding so plumeless a Cyrano as presented by Winsten in what, according to him, was the final act of the last days at Ayot Saint Lawrence. I am tempted to say that this book should have been called *Winsten's Corner* rather than *Shaw's*, for it is painfully obvious that a greater man would have called forth something more of the old response. Even the not inconsiderable vigor and vivacity of Shaw's latest plays and prefaces (1947/8) are missing. In fact, it is almost as painfully obvious that, although in a sad sort of way Shaw felt he ought to be grateful to the Winstens, he did not altogether care for them, and that this accounts for the antagonism and un-Shavian moodiness of some of his remarks.

Mr. Winsten maintains: "Our friendship was of an extraordinary character; I must have acted as a catalyst, for he invariably became bright and talkative in my presence and antagonistic away from me. He found it easy to say mean things about me to others and yet hung on to me for life," and that Shaw had declared: "Until you both came along I had never known a simple kindly relationship." Shaw even became apologetic: "You must think me a wicked bounder but there is always a pathological side to greatness. You've hit the pathological side." And "I know that life has dealt you many a harsh blow, but the harshest of all was to inflict me on you. A sage can be a plague, dont I know it." Of a certain visitor he is made to say: "I like her because she brings out the worst in me, or to put it mathematically: she is to me as I am to you."

Shaw accused Winsten of inaccuracy on several occasions, and the author still does not reveal his method of reporting. He disclaims not-taking or even a good memory. Maybe this is why it is that so much of the Shavian conversation (never easy to emulate) seems to lack the true ring, often sounds decidedly flat. The book, in itself more of a pathological study, has an ultimately depressing effect—a flavor of dust and ashes that has been left with us by no other Shavian work except the very end of the Shaw-Campbell correspondence.

Nevertheless, *Shaw's Corner* is not unimportant, and it contains many revealing passages. Some Shavians may wish that Mr. Winsten had gone on hiding his light under a bushel, but by that light he has striven to be faithful. He does not pretend to be other than he is, and is conscious that his only call to fame may be as neighbor to genius. There could not but be some sadness about the declining days of that genius. There are, incidentally, interesting accounts of Shaw's devotion to the work of a fellow-genius, Charles Chaplin (whom he likens to himself), of a private showing in Winsten's home of that great film *Monsieur Verdoux*, and of Shaw's meeting with another film star, Danny Kaye. There are

touching indications of Shaw's memory of and gratitude to his early friends: "If I had my life over again I'd probably not have the luck. The right people always came along: Lee in Ireland, Salt when I settled in England, the perfect gentleman, the Webbs, Granville-Barker; with such people my success was inevitable. Such people will never come again"—especially Sidney Webb: "He had a passion for precision, the factual statement, cold calculating prose. I think I loved him more than I could love any woman." There are also the passages that do ring true—e.g., "To an old man it is the trivial that is exciting; wars and revolutions leave him cold"; "There is nothing sacred about nature. The Life Force is the one inescapable thing in life. It caught me unawares and made me the poetic, irrational, passionate creature I am"; "It's the fool who can answer all the questions; a wise man asks and does not expect an answer"; and as a final quotation, despite its preliminary sadness:

"One day I'll hear what I want to hear," he said (speaking of radio programs).

"And what is that?" I asked.

He looked at me almost lovingly, and said: "That I am dead."

There was silence and then he took out of his pocket an examination paper and read out a question set on his plays: "Discuss Bernard Shaw as a delineator of female character."

"This pompous question had to be answered by boys and girls of fifteen, I am given to understand. I couldn't answer it myself. What do they know of female character or male character? I'm probably ninety per cent female and the other one percent or so male. Have you ever met a pure female? I haven't. Was St. Joan a female? All my characters are human beings; and what cannot be said of other dramatists: all the human beings are characters."



Membership Announcements

Delinquent members are respectfully reminded that they will not receive the September issue of the *Shaw Bulletin* unless their membership dues for 1955 are received by the treasurer before September 1st. Members are further reminded that all fees and contributions to The Shaw Society of America, Inc., are tax-deductible. Memberships are determined on a calendar year basis. Special student memberships, at \$2.50 per year, are offered to college undergraduate students; may we suggest that a gift membership to a student makes a unique birthday present and encourages youthful interest in our Shavian activities. Members of the Shaw Society (London) who reside outside the United States and Canada are eligible for associate membership in The Shaw Society of America for an annual fee of 12s6d, payable to their Hon. General Secretary.

Theatre Notes

The Phoenix's Dilemma

The most important person in a Shaw play is never listed in the cast of characters. I refer, of course, to the personified community of which the audience is a miniature cross-section. Where Ibsen is content to strike at the sore spots in our individual consciences, Shaw summons us to the judgment bar to answer for our part in the conduct and moral standard of the whole community. The community, society, or the race of man is invariably the principal Shavian target. If this invisible, yet ever-present, personage is forgotten or overlooked by the play's director, the play is robbed of its deepest meaning and of its Shavian drive. This is precisely what happened to the Phoenix Theatre production of *The Doctor's Dilemma*, as we shall see after a glance at the story.

Sir Colenso Ridgeon, aged fifty, is a research doctor, famous for the discovery of a new method of curing tuberculosis. His process is so expensive, however, that when two new sufferers with special claims turn up, Ridgeon has room for only one. Which of the two applicants to choose—that is the doctor's dilemma.

One of the afflicted men is Louis Dubedat, aged twenty-three, a portrait painter of incontestable genius. The other is Blenkinsop, a slum doctor too honest to be anything but desperately poor. Ridgeon's choice is unexpectedly complicated by his falling madly in love with Jennifer, Dubedat's beguiling young wife. Shall he save the artist and be satisfied with Jennifer's gratitude? Or shall he let him die and win her hand? Having brains and conscience enough to understand the nature of his dilemma, Ridgeon invites four medical friends to help him reach an honorable decision.

Dazzled by Jennifer's beauty and Dubedat's fascinating genius, the doctors unanimously vote to save the artist instead of poor humdrum Dr. Blenkinsop. Before long, however, they learn that the engaging young Dubedat is an unashamed bigamist and money-sponger, one who does not hesitate to blackmail his close friends and even his own wife. This revelation gives Ridgeon a perfect excuse for breaking his promise to Jennifer to save Louis. He does not crudely kill the artist himself, of course. He simply turns him over to Sir Ralph Bloomfield-Bonnington—known as B. B.—an upper-class doctor with a childlike faith in the power of any vaccine to cure every disease by "stimulating the phagocytes." It is his fixed opinion that a lockjaw vaccine will cure typhoid as surely as a typhoid vaccine will cure lockjaw. As the audience foresees, Dubedat dies of galloping consumption in no time.

But Ridgeon does not get the artist's widow, who never forgives him for breaking his word to her. A year later the two meet in a Bond Street gallery which is showing the late Dubedat's much advertised pictures. Jennifer accuses Ridgeon of having killed her husband in a fit of mean jealousy. Ridgeon frankly admits the indirect killing, but hotly

disclaims the motive of jealousy. He explains that he killed Louis so that the memory of her *dead* husband would bring her a lasting happiness of which the misconduct of her *living* husband would have made short shrift. In a word, he has sacrificed Louis for Jennifer's good as lightheartedly as Louis would at any time have sacrificed Jennifer for Louis' pleasure.

Jennifer angrily repudiates the doctor's self-justification. Yet she unconsciously bears it out by acknowledging that her one mission in life will henceforth be the apotheosis of Louis, her dream-idol, her King of Men. Yes, she adds, she is supremely happy now because—and her reason leaves the audience as stunned as Ridgeon—she has just quietly married a rich business man who has sworn to devote his money and his time to putting Dubedat in the art world's Hall of Fame.

Certain newspaper critics were of the opinion that this was a play of Shaw's in which poetic justice triumphs. It is hard to tell whether they were referring to Dubedat's moving death scene or to Ridgeon's bitter loss of Jennifer. In any case, the *poetic justice* claim is all eyewash. Dubedat is slain not by poetic justice, but by the incredibly ignorant B. B., into whose hands Ridgeon could not have consigned him if a morally alive community had provided enough hospital beds for Ridgeon's superior medical treatment to become free and universal. Again, it is not poetic justice that causes Ridgeon to lose Jennifer. He loses her because the community has encouraged the girl to become a beautiful but romantic noodle, preferring the rich man who flatters her Dubedat-idolatry to the sceptical Ridgeon, who tries to open her eyes to the truth. Poetic justice indeed! What actually prevails all round is a very unpoetic injustice, which triumphs because we are members of an incorrigibly thoughtless community. As Dubedat quite excusably wails: "Why wont people *think*, instead of bleating and blah-ing like a lot of silly sheep!"

If the Phoenix show seemed full of bleating and blah-ing and quite devoid of soul or fire, the explanation is that Sidney Lumet, the director, failed to plumb the depths of the play. Not once did his production make us feel the mystic presence of that all-important though invisible person, the community. Shaw's pregnant speeches became sparkling wise-cracks that showed up the smooth blackguardism of Dubedat and the cynical professionalism of the doctors, but utterly failed to bring home to us, the members of the audience, our part in aiding and abetting a ghastly social crime. Not once were we cut to the heart with the realization that the doctor's dilemma was really the community's dilemma. To poor Mr. Lumet it was all just a funny satire at the expense now of the young artist and now of the medical profession. The dramatist's deeper vision escaped him completely.

Consider, for example, the crucial moment in the first studio scene when Dubedat gets fed up with the razzing the doctors give him for his moral obliquity. He lashes out with: "I do not believe in morality: I am a disciple of Bernard Shaw." What does Mr. Lumet do with this key line and the related lines that follow? Instead of playing them up for all they are worth, he calmly rips them from the text. Think of it! Theatrically, the deleted passage scores a bull's eye. Psychologically,

it is a key to an understanding of Dubedat's immature belief that his own sub-morality is the same as Shaw's super-morality, since both are opposed to accepted conventional morals. Dramatically, it pin-points the tragic lack of moral responsibility, not only in Dubedat as a private person and in the doctors as professional persons, but in all of us as part of a corrupt community. And this is the indispensable key-passage that Lumet omits! By the way, Louis Dubedat is mistaken in supposing that he has no morality. His morality is the simple morality of *laissez faire*: "Whatever is good for me is good for the country." The same morality was recently proclaimed by an important Washington cabinet officer: "I believe," said this gentleman proudly, "that whatever is good for General Motors is good for the United States." Dubedat said it more tersely, but no less sincerely.

The lesson of the Phoenix production is that, if the director cannot get to the Shavian root of the matter, the performance will be a soulless and wooden one. It was not the fault of the players who, under the director's dead hand, had to make bricks out of straw. Even so, Shaw at his slowest gave better entertainment value than any of the theatrical cheeseburgers that now sizzle on Broadway. Especially good individual showings were made by Roddy McDowall as Dubedat, by Philip Bourneuf as the serene old medical arbiter of Victorian morality, and by Peggy Pope, whose spontaneous gaiety made her whirlwind capture of Dubedat quite credible. The Epilogue in the picture gallery was one of the bright spots that escaped the director's clammy touch. In this scene Geraldine Fitzgerald came to independent life, and displayed her skill and charm to such good purpose that at last we understood why Ridgeon had been so mad about her that he had tried to solve his dilemma with a "disinterested" murder, the sort of murder that hits the headlines and starts the community bleating and blah-ing, but which never stirs the communal spirit to the point of taking remedial action for the future.

—Felix Grendon



In Our September Issue

Arthur H. Nethercot's biographical and critical study of the public and private relationship of "G.B.S. and Annie Besant." Frank Scully's "The Ghost Talks," relating the "inside story" of Scully's ghost-authorship of the biography of Shaw purportedly written by Frank Harris. Dan H. Laurence's "The Facts About 'Why She Would Not,'" analyzing Shaw's last play and dispelling the false reports concerning the supposedly "incomplete" comedietta. Alexander Seabrook's "Footlights on Shaw," a review of the Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson pictorial compilation, the *Theatrical Companion to Shaw*.